

H

olidays may
be stressful

this year due to anxieties about safety and what the future may bring. Some may be facing the holidays without family, friends or co-workers. It may be that we don't have our normal energy level for shopping or entertaining.

Although the season may be challenging, there are ways to beat the stress and have meaningful moments with our loved ones. This brochure provides some practical steps to help reduce stress during this holiday season.

Alexandria Community Services Board

- 24-hour emergency crisis intervention services
- 24-hour detoxification services
- Evaluation and assessment
- Individual, family and group counseling
- Day support and vocational services
- Residential services
- Inpatient services
- Prevention and early intervention services
- Service fees are based on ability to pay or without charge
- Multi-language availability

The Alexandria Community Services Board is a group of 16 citizen volunteers appointed by Alexandria's City Council. The CSB oversees the city's publicly funded services for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse.

It is a CSB policy not to discriminate in the admission to its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, sex, handicap, religion or national or ethnic origins. Programs and activities are accessible to people with physically handicapping conditions. If you require accommodations please call (703) 838-4455 or TDD (703) 838-5054.



Coping With Holiday Stress



Offering mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services for the City of Alexandria.



(703) 838-6400

24 hours a day

TDD: (703) 838-5054

www.ci.alexandria.va.us/mhmrsa/

Tips for Reducing Holiday Stress

- ~ Set time aside to think about lost loved ones. Talk about your feelings. Do something to honor their memories such as lighting a candle, singing a song, saying a prayer or eating your loved one's favorite food.
- ~ Don't allow your holiday expectations to be determined by magazine pictures or unrealistic television scenes. High expectations cause pressure. Nobody can create the picture-perfect home or family. Do the best you can and know that it is good enough.
- ~ Establish a budget and stick to it. Be realistic about what you can spend on gifts, entertainment, decorations and travel.
- ~ When giving gifts, remember that it's the thought that counts. Remind children of this too. Handmade gifts will help you to save as well as carry a special message to friends and relatives.
- ~ Surprises are nice, but asking people what they want makes shopping easier.
- ~ Ask for help. If you have guests, ask them to bring part of the meal. They will feel good about being able to contribute.

~ Find time for yourself to relax and reflect on the simple joys of the holidays. When you feel overwhelmed, take a break.

~ Don't feel obligated to visit everybody. Plan in advance which days, times and meals you will spend with whom. Don't be afraid to say no, or alternate who you visit with each year.

~ Give yourself permission to decorate less and drop one or two family traditions in order to reduce stress.

~ Avoid becoming intoxicated, eat healthy foods and get plenty of exercise and rest so you have energy, feel good and avoid family conflicts. When entertaining, do not encourage or pressure your guests to have "one more" drink.

~ Don't feel bad if you're not happy. Holiday blues are normal and temporary.

~ Remember that one reason for the holidays is renewal through sharing love and faith with others.



KIDS & HOLIDAY STRESS

Children often experience stress during the holidays due to sadness for lost loved ones, parental/guardian stress, or over-excitement.

Signs of stress in children include:

- Hyperactivity
- Crying and sadness
- Clinging, or fear of strangers
- Worry, nightmares, fear of darkness
- Regression to immature behavior such as bed wetting or thumb sucking.
- Increased shyness or aggression
- Headaches, stomachaches and other pain
- Talking of death or dying

Some ideas on how to help:

- Manage your own stress
- **Maintain normal household routines**
- Talk with youth about their feelings at a level they can understand
- **Encourage youth to express their feelings through drawings or playing**
- Enforce established rules and consequences
- **Include youth in planning a ceremony to remember and honor lost loved ones**
- Teach youth about different cultural holidays
- **Involve youth in holiday preparation; ask for and include their ideas**
- Spend peaceful individual time with each child, doing quiet activities they enjoy (Try just 10 minutes a day!)
- **Have your entire family plan and participate in giving (time, money, gifts) to someone less fortunate**
- Give youth lots of hugs, love and patience